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Carolyn Ballard
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Representative Joseph Knollenberg
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Iraqi refugees

Dear Representative Knollenberg,

The US-led invasion of Iraq has led to a refugee crisis of staggering proportions. Some 1.2 million refugees are stranded in Syria, over 500,000 in Jordan, and more than 2 million people are displaced inside Iraq. I very strongly urge you to act now to address the plight of millions of Iraqi refugees.

Most refugees are women and children, and many are single mothers. They are unable to work in the host countries where they are undocumented and are struggling to pay the rising costs of rent, food and medicines. Desperate parents are sending their children to work instead of school, often in oppressive conditions. Increasing numbers of women are driven to prostitution. As a result of the horrific violence they experienced in Iraq, trauma and depression are widespread and, for the most part, untreated.

The host countries of Syria and Jordan, overwhelmed by the burden, have closed their borders. Recent reports from the Iraqi Government, UN agencies and international NGOs all warn of the threat to Iraq's orphaned and vulnerable children. The United Nations, humanitarian organizations and religious groups trying to provide services are grossly underfunded. So far this year, the United States has given only $208 million in direct humanitarian aid for displaced Iraqis, less than what we spend in ONE DAY on military operations in Iraq.

I urge you to dramatically reorient U.S. policies to address the urgent needs of Iraqi women and children. First, stop funding the war. General Petraeus himself has said that there is no military solution to the problem in Iraq. We must withdraw our troops and use diplomatic power and the help of the international community to promote a reconciliation process that will end the violence and allow refugees to return home safely.

Second, we must recognize our enormous responsibility toward the refugees and fund 50 percent of all appeals from international organizations serving Iraqis. We must also provide significant financial aid to Syria and Jordan to compensate them for the strain on health, education, electricity, water and other basic services they have been providing for the refugees.

Finally, the U.S. has been woefully inadequate in resettling Iraqis in the United States, including those refugees who were targets of violence for having worked with the United States. The 2008 quota of 12,000 should be met and then increased to at least 30,000 Iraqis a year.

With 8 million Iraqis living in poverty and more than 15% of the population having fled their homes, we urge you to recognize our profound moral and legal responsibility to help the Iraqis whose lives have been devastated by the U.S. invasion and the sectarian violence it unleashed. The Iraqi refugees are growing more desperate every day. For the sake of all the innocent victims of our disastrous policy, please act now.

Most sincerely, Carolyn Ballard

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